

THE SNEETCHES

by Theodor Geisel (1961)

Now, the Star-Belly Sneetches
Had bellies with stars.
The Plain-Belly Sneetches
Had none upon thars.

Those stars weren't so big. They were really so small
You might think such a thing wouldn't matter at all.
But, because they had stars, all the Star-Belly Sneetches
Would brag, "We're the best kind of Sneetch on the beaches."
With their snoots in the air, they would sniff and they'd snort
"We'll have nothing to do with the Plain-Belly sort!"
And whenever they met some, when they were out walking,
They'd hike right on past them without even talking.

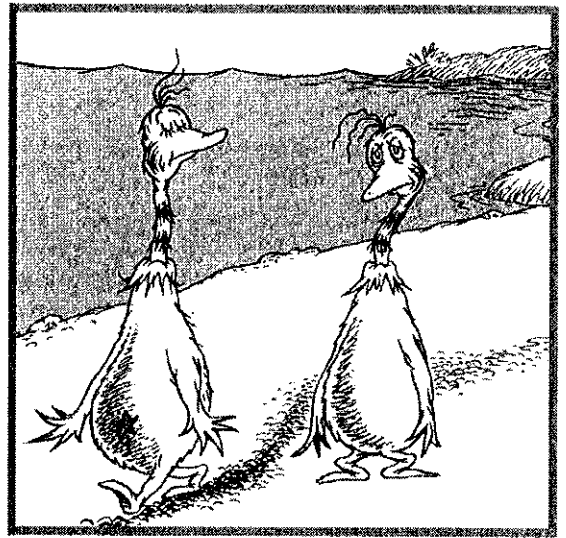
When the Star-Belly children went out to play ball,
Could a Plain-Belly get in the game...? Not at all.
You could only play if your bellies had stars
And the Plain-Belly children had none upon thars.

When the Star-Belly Sneetches had frankfurter roasts
Or picnics or parties or marshmallow toasts,
They never invited the Plain-Belly Sneetches.
They left them out cold, in the dark of the beaches.
They kept them away. Never let them come near.
And that's how they treated them year after year.

Then ONE day, it seems...while the Plain-Belly Sneetches
Were moping and doping alone on the beaches,
Just sitting there wishing their bellies had stars...
A stranger zipped up in the strangest of cars!

"My friends," he announced in a voice clear and keen,
"My name is Sylvester McMonkey McBean.
And I've heard of your troubles. I've heard you're unhappy.
But I can fix that. I'm the Fix-it-Up Chappie.
I've come here to help you. I have what you need.
And my prices are low. And I work at great speed.
And my work is one hundred per cent guaranteed!"

Then, quickly, Sylvester McMonkey McBean
Put together a very peculiar machine.
And he said, "You want stars like a Star-Belly Sneetch...?
My friends, you can have them for three dollars each!"



"Just pay me your money and hop right aboard!"
 So they clambered inside. Then the big machine roared
 And it clonked. And it bonked. And it jerked. And it berked
 And it bopped them about. But the thing really worked!
 When the Plain-Belly Sneetches popped out, they had stars!
 They actually did. They had stars upon thars!

Then they yelled at the ones who had stars from the start,
 "We're exactly like you! You can't tell us apart.
 We're all just the same, now, you snooty old smarties!
 And now we can go to your frankfurter parties."

"Good grief!" groaned the ones who had stars at the first.
 "We're *still* the best Sneetches and they are the worst.
 But, now, how in the world will we know," they all frowned,
 "If which kind is what, or the other way round?"

Then up came McBean with a very sly wink
 And he said, "Things are not quite as bad as you think.
 So you don't know who's who. That's perfectly true.
 But come with me, friends. Do you know what I'll do?
 I'll make you, again, the best Sneetches on beaches
 And all it will cost you is ten dollars eaches."

Belly stars are no longer in style," said McBean.
 "What you need is a trip through my Star-Off machine.
 This wondrous contraption will take *off* your stars
 So you won't look like Sneetches who have them on thars."
 And that handy machine
 Working very precisely
 Removed all the stars from their tummies quite nicely.

Then, with snoots in the air, they paraded about
 And they opened their beaks and they let out a shout,
 "We know who is who! Now there isn't a doubt.
 The best kind of Sneetches are Sneetches without!"

Then, of course, those with stars all got frightfully mad.
 To be wearing a star now was frightfully bad.
 Then, of course, old Sylvester McMonkey McBean
 Invited *them* into his Star-Off Machine.

Then, of course from then on, as you probably guess,
 Things really got into a horrible mess.

All the rest of that day, on those wild screaming beaches,
 The Fix-it-Up Chappie kept fixing up Sneetches.
 Off again! On again!



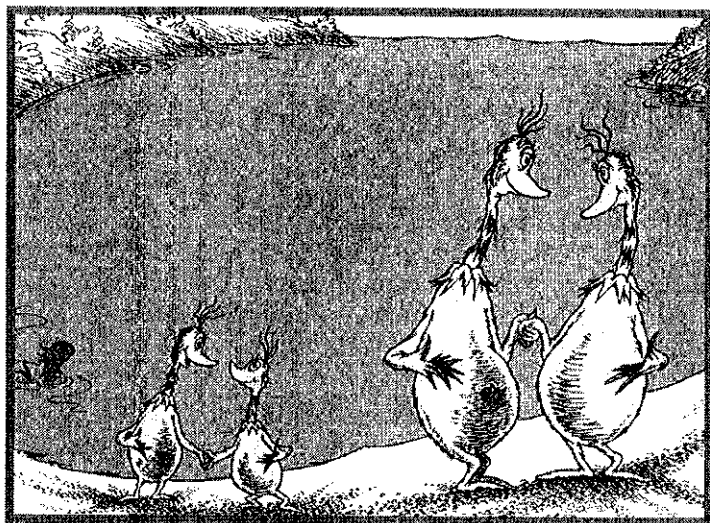
In again! Out again!
Through the machines they raced round and about again,
Changing their stars every minute or two.
They kept paying money. They kept running through
Until neither the Plain nor the Star-Bellies knew
Whether this one was that one...or that one was this one
Or which one was what one...or what one was who.

Then, when every last cent
Of their money was spent,
The Fix-it-Up Chappie packed up
And he went.

And he laughed as he drove
In his car up the beach,
"They never will learn.
No. You can't teach a Sneetch!"

But McBean was quite wrong. I'm quite happy to say
The Sneetches got really quite smart on that day,
The day they decided that Sneetches are Sneetches
And no kind of Sneetch is the best on the beaches.
That day, all the Sneetches forgot about stars
And whether they had one, or not, upon thars.

The end.





Freedom Summer

by Deborah Wiles

A Note About The Text

In the early 1960s the American South had long been a place where black Americans could not drink from the same drinking fountains as whites, attend the same schools, or enjoy the same public areas. Then the Civil Rights Act of 1964 became the law and stated that "All persons shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment" of any public place, regardless of "... race, color, religion, or national origin."

I was born a white child in Mobile, Alabama, and spent summers visiting my beloved Mississippi relatives. When the Civil Rights Act was passed, the town pool closed. So did the roller rink and the ice cream parlor. Rather than lawfully giving black the same rights and freedoms as whites, many southern businesses chose to shut their doors in protest. Some of them closed forever.

Also in the summer of 1964, civil rights workers in Mississippi organized "Freedom Summer," a movement to register black Americans to vote. It was a time of great racial violence and change. That was the summer I began to pay attention: I noticed that black Americans used back doors, were waited on only after every white had been helped, and were treated poorly, all because of the color of their skin . . . and no matter what any law said. I realized that a white person openly having a black friend, and vice versa, could be a dangerous thing. I couldn't get these thoughts and images out of my mind, and I wondered what it must be like to be a

black child my age. I dreamed about changing things, and yet I wondered what any child—black or white—could do.

This story grew out of my feelings surrounding that time. It is fiction, but based on real events.



Story Begins Here

↪ **John Henry Waddell** is my best friend. His mama works for my mama. Her name is Annie Mae. Every morning at eight o'clock Annie Mae steps off the country bus and walks up the long hill to my house. If it's summer, John Henry is step-step-stepping-it right beside her.

We like to help Annie Mae. We shell butter beans. We sweep the front porch. We let the cats in, then chase the cats out of the house until Annie Mae says, "Shoo! Enough of you two! Go Play!"

We shoot marbles in the dirt until we're too hot to be alive. Then we yell, "Last one in is a rotten egg!" and run straight for Fiddlers Creek.

John Henry swims better than anybody I know. He crawls like a catfish, blows bubbles like a swamp monster, but he doesn't swim in the town pool with me. He's not allowed. So we dam the creek with rocks and sticks to make a swimming spot, then holler and jump in, wearing only our skin.

John Henry's skin is the color of browned butter. He smells like pine needles after a good rain. My skin is the color of the pale moths that dance around the porch at night. John Henry says I smell like a just-washed sock.

"This means war!" I shout.

We churn that water into a white hurricane and laugh until our side hurt. Then we float on our backs and spout like whales.

"I'm gonna be a fireman when I grow up," I say.

"Me, too," says John Henry.

I have two nickels for ice pops, so we put on our clothes and walk to town. John Henry doesn't come with me through the front door of Mr. Mason's General Store. He's not allowed.

"How you doin', Young Joe?" asks Mr. Mason. He winks and says, "You gonna eat these all by yourself?"

My heart skips a quick-beat. "I got one for a friend," I say, and scoot out the door.

"Yessir, it's mighty hot out there!" Mr. Mason calls after me.

"I love ice pops," says John Henry.

"Me, too," I say.

Annie Mae makes dinner for my family every night. She creams the corn and rolls the biscuits.

Daddy stirs his iced tea and says, "The town pool opens tomorrow to everybody under the sun, no matter what color."

"That's the law," Mama tells me. She helps my plate with peas and says, "It's the way it's going to be now—Everybody Together—lunch counters, rest rooms, drinking fountains, too."

I wiggle in my chair like a doodlebug. "I got to be excused!" I shout, and run into the kitchen to tell John Henry.

I'm gonna swim in the town pool!" he hollers. "Is it deep?"

"REAL deep," I tell him. And the water's so clear, you can jump to the bottom and open your eyes and still see."

"Let's be the first ones there," says John Henry. "I'll bring my good-luck nickel, and we can dive for it."

Next morning, as soon as the sun peeks into the sky, here comes my best friend, John Henry Waddell, run-run-running to meet me.

"Let's go!" he yells, I got my nickel," and I run right with him, all the way to the town swimming pool.

We race each other over the last hill and . . . we stop.

Country dump trucks are here. They grind and back up to the empty pool. Workers rake steaming asphalt into the hole where sparkling clean water used to be. One of them is John Henry's big brother, Will Rogers. We start to call to him, "What happened?" but he see us first and points back down the road—it means "Git on home!"

But our feet feel stuck, we can't budge. So we hunker in the tall weeds and watch all morning until the pool is filled with hot, spongy tar. Sssssss! Smoky steam rises in the air. Workers tie planks to their shoes and stomp on the blacktop to make it smooth.

Will Rogers heaves his shovel into the back of an empty truck and climbs up with the other workers. His face is like a storm cloud, and I know this job has made him angry.

"Let's go!" a boss man shots, and the trucks rumble-slam down the road.



It's so quiet now, we can hear the breeze whisper through the grass. We sit in the diving board and stare at the tops of the silver ladders sticking up from the tar. My heart beats hard in my chest.

John Henry's voice shakes. "White folks don't want colored folks in their pool."

"Your wrong, John Henry," I say, but know he's right.

"Let's go back to Fiddler's Creek," I say. "I didn't want to swim in this pool anyway."

John Henry's eyes fill up with angry tears. "I did," he says. "I wanted to swim in this pool. I want to do everything you can do."

I don't know what to say, but as we walk back to town, my head starts to pop with new ideas. I want to go to the Dairy Dip with John Henry, sit down and share root beer floats. I want us to go to the picture show, buy popcorn, and watch the movie together.

I want to see this town with John Henry's eyes.

We stop in front of Mr. Mason's store. I jam my hands into my pockets while my mind searches for words to put with my new ideas. My fingers close around two nickels. "Want to get an ice pop?"

John Henry wipes his eyes and takes a breath. "I want to pick it out myself."

I swallow hard and my heart says yes. "Let's do that," I say. I give John Henry one of my nickels.

He shakes his head. "I've got my own."

We look at each other.

Then we walk through the front door together.

